

Jones Point Lighthouse
Jones Point
Alexandria, Virginia

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington, D. C.
20242

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JONES POINT LIGHTHOUSE

Location: On Jones Point on the Potomac River outside of Alexandria, Virginia, and near the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

Present Owner: Mount Vernon Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

Present Occupant: Unoccupied

Present Use: Unused

Brief Statement of Significance: The Jones Point Lighthouse is one of the last remaining examples of Potomac River Lighthouse Architecture. Built in 1855 and used until 1926, the lighthouse was placed near number 1 boundary marker for the District of Columbia. Many efforts have been made to preserve the lighthouse as a portion of Potomac River Naval history.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Jones Point Lighthouse was built in 1855 by the United States Government as an aid to navigation on the Potomac River. The building was located on the tip of Jones Point, just below Alexandria, Virginia, and 15 feet behind the cornerstone of the District of Columbia.

On April 3, 1855 the United States purchased a lot 30 by 100 feet from the Manassas Gap Railroad Company, and set up the lighthouse. Jones Point was a very narrow wedge of land at that time. In 1861 the United States Corps of Engineers built a retaining wall around the lighthouse and yard.

In 1912 the government reclaimed 46.57 acres adjacent to Jones Point under the June 1910 River and Harbor Act. This area, known as "Battery Cove," was then leased for about 12 years to the Virginia Ship Building Company.

By 1926 the lighthouse was replaced by a light on a tower close by. Thus the lighthouse was deeded by the United States to the Mount Vernon Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

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on May 22, 1926. The D.A.R. intended to preserve the building as a historic monument to river travel. The deed, signed by Walter Drake, had been given with certain reservations. In 1929 on the 23rd of October the Washington Quartermaster Depot took Battery Cove. In 1931 a military radio station was installed there, and in 1934 the United States Signal Corps was given control of the cove.

During World War II the Signal Corps fenced in most of Battery Cove and Jones Point, which gave the D.A.R. limited access to the lighthouse for maintenance. In 1944 the entire building was surrounded and the ownership of the lighthouse and its 3,000 square feet of land reverted to the government. The government's action was taken in the interest of national security.

After World War II there were considerable efforts by the Mount Vernon D.A.R. and their representative, Colonel H. G. Outwater, to secure damages and control of the building again. On the 8th of February 1951 Representative Howard Smith presented a bill to Congress to give the D.A.R. the sum of \$9,678.10 for "*** settlement of claims of such chapter against the United States for the cost of repairing and restoring the Jones Point Lighthouse, Alexandria, Virginia." The bill was never acted upon.

The order of construction is as follows:

The main building was constructed in 1855.
The 30 by 80 by 5 foot retaining wall was installed in 1861.
Close to the turn of the century the west porch was added.
The small utility structure near the building replaced a similar structure.
The marker was uncovered in 1912.

According to tradition, this cornerstone (number 1 marker of the District of Columbia) was set in place on April 15, 1791. The marker stood unharmed through the construction of the lighthouse in 1855, but in 1861 the Corps of Engineers erected a retaining wall around the building and covered the stone. In 1912 the boundary marker was uncovered and a concrete box was built around it. This box had a window in the front to allow viewing and an iron fence for protection.

At the time of this writing (August 1963) most of the siding, trim and architectural features had been removed from the building. The two chimneys had collapsed and the whole was well

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overgrown and gutted. The historic boundary marker in front of the lighthouse, which was saved in 1912, was in such a deplorable condition that the concrete box surrounding it had collapsed, the retaining wall and land around it had eroded and the waters of the Potomac were swirling around the very cornerstone of the National Capital.

Prepared by Donald B. Myer
Architect
NCDC, National Park Service
Washington, D. C.
September 1963

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Jones Point Lighthouse is a small rectangular 19 by 38 foot frame two-story structure perched on the edge of the Potomac River at the outskirts of Alexandria, Virginia. From the center of its gabled roof protrudes a cast iron lantern, whose gaslight once guided boats up the Potomac River. Important because of its place in American river navigation, the building is located within feet of the number 1 boundary marker for the District of Columbia, placed in 1791. On August 7, 1963, the building was desolate, lost, forgotten and barely standing. Most of the siding, roofing, plaster and trim were missing.

This report was made on existing physical evidence and photographs. Even though many portions of the building had been removed many were found in the undergrowth nearby. Marks and holes in the building showed the former locations.

The building is a rectangular block facing south on the edge of the Potomac. Siding is clapboard and the gabled roof has wooden shingles. The south or front elevation has the main entrance in the center. This being a 6-panel door with side lights and steps. On either side was one window with blinds and a basement window below. There are no second floor windows on the front. On the west end of the building is a porch which is a later addition. There is a chimney on each end of the building, inside the wall. From the center of the gable roof protrudes the lantern, which is cast iron. This has trapezoidal windows. The roof being also iron and the shape of a cone topped by a small domed cylinder with air vents. In the front of the lantern was a small door which gave access to a catwalk around the lantern perimeter.

All sides of the building are finished similar to the front of the building with clapboards and simple Greek Revival trim. The first floor had wooden blinds, the second floor had none. All of the windows were wooden double-hung 6 over 6 light sash. There is an ornamental deep cornice molding which contained a wooden eaves-trough, later covered over with shingles when semicircular metal gutters were added.

The lighthouse was constructed on brick foundations about 4 feet of which were exposed above grade.

From physical evidence and old photographs the original color of the lighthouse was very close to white. The brick foundations and the retaining wall around the lighthouse were also painted this light color. The shutters seem to have been painted a contrasting medium dark color and the lantern appears to have been close to, if not, black. The front door at the turn of the century was the same as the walls.

The lighthouse sits on an artificial mound held in by a stone retaining wall about 5 feet high and 30 feet by 80 feet in plan. Most of this site has been fenced in by a wooden picket fence up to the present. Until 1912, when the District of Columbia boundary marker was uncovered and put in a concrete box for view, it was under the retaining wall, which had been built over it in 1861. Prior to this interest in the boundary marker, there had been an open wooden stairway from the top of the retaining wall to the shore, this being directly on axis with the front door of the lighthouse.

About 40 feet to the west of the lighthouse and also on the mound is a small utility structure part of which was a privy. From old photographs this frame gable-roofed structure had a chimney at one time. This building is about 10 feet by 12 feet.

In a photograph taken prior to 1900 a small shed-roofed wooden structure with board and batten sides is shown. The utilitarian nature of the structure is obvious, especially because of the unglazed, unframed window facing the river. The high part of the shed roof is facing the lighthouse. The building was about 15 feet west of the lighthouse. The lighthouse was constructed on brick foundations. The walls are post and beam with diagonal knee braces in the corners. The joints are mortise and tenon throughout. The roof has a ridge pole and boards run parallel to it.

The interior of the lighthouse has two square rooms on the first floor, one to the east and one to the west of the central entry-stair hall. This hall gave access to the basement by means of a straight run stairway and to the second floor by means of 180 degree winder stair. Both first floor rooms contained fireplaces with hearths; these have been removed. The existing trim is a very simple Greek Revival style. The walls and ceilings here as in the rest of the house were plaster.

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On the second floor there is also a center hall flanked on the east and the west by square rooms. This hall has the stair leading down to the first floor and a ship's ladder up to the lantern. Both rooms and the hall have plastered walls and ceiling. The trim is small in scale but more ornate than used on the first floor.

None of the interior doors or hardware exists.

The interior of the lantern is a cylindrical room reached by means of the ship's ladder through a hatch. The walls up to the level of the trapezoidal windows, which are continuous around the perimeter, are finished in tongue-and-groove vertical boards. The floor in the lantern, as in the first and second floors, is wood board.

The basement of the lighthouse has exposed brick walls, which at one time were painted white. There is no finished ceiling. The floor seems to have been paved in brick. At one time there was a single board width partition closing off the eastern third of the basement. On the north side of the building in the center is an areaway which was an outside entrance to the basement. The areaway is of brick and is about 5 feet high from the basement floor. On the exterior the rim of the areaway is about 3 feet above grade. There was besides the usual stairway from the areaway to the basement one from the rim of the areaway back down to grade. This was no doubt done to prevent water from splashing into the basement. There are pintles on the basement windows, no doubt also part of a system to keep high water out of the basement. The basement windows, one of which was on the site at the time of this writing, were of the hopper type with three horizontal lights. There are two brick piers in the basement in the area of the stair well. These were built at different times, due to the fact that they are built of different sized brick.

Aside from the two first floor fireplaces there is no evidence of a heating system. Of the possible lighting systems, only a gas pipe to the lantern remains.

Little remains of the hardware. The pintles were found in place on the basement windows. There were also some found on the fragments of the first floor windows. The double hung windows have cast iron weights.

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Some of the materials found on the site, but detached from the building were as follows:

1. Part of a shutter and pintle, first floor size.
2. First floor window frame, showing weight boxes, pullies and sash channels.
3. Cast iron window weights.
4. Curved sections of the flooring for the catwalk on the roof around the lantern.
5. Stair treads. Oak with rounded nose. Trapezoidal in shape as would have been for a winding stair.
6. Two parts of a ladder which ran from the second floor to the lantern.
7. Threshold from the front door, showing the size of the sidelights.
8. Parts of the stairway framing, showing that it was a winder, and what size the steps were.
9. Railing from the west porch.
10. Small very light 3-foot ladder.
11. Assorted clapboards and shingles.

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